

Possible cooperation between Verkmenntaskólinn á Akureyri, Island og Charlottenlund videregående skole, Trondheim, Norge

Some thoughts and ideas after a visit in Akureyri October 4th - 6th , 2013

Meeting in VMA Saturday October 5th 2013 9:00 – 14.00.

Attending the meeting were Torkild Svorkmo-Lundberg from Charlottenlund VGS, Ingvild Espelien and Bente Ryen from Skjetlein VGS and Jóhannes Árnason from VMA.

Ingvild and Bente left 11.30 but after this Torkild and Johannes discussed further the things already mentioned. Included in the meeting was a 30 min tour around VMA facilities.

www.vma.is

www.charlottenlund.vgs.no

The first thing to ask is: Why cooperation between Verkmenntaskólinn and Charlottenlund vgs?

The schools have approximately the same number of students (1200 -1300).

The schools both offer vocational and academic studies

Several vocational studies are in common of the two schools

Both schools have challenges related to a high number of students not completing their studies

Icelandic and Norwegian school systems are in many ways similar and comparable, which makes cooperation and comparison easy and relevant. This is also related to the fact that Nordic countries have been cooperating for a long time and share values and the structure of the society is similar. It is the belief of Torkild and Jóhannes that this might lead to more detailed cooperation than would be possible if either school was cooperating with a different culture in a far away country. This does not mean that cooperating with different school systems is not important but here we are perhaps looking at details in designing solutions to common problems and cooperation that would perhaps not be as relevant when working with very different systems.

There seems to be many differences in how the two schools try to solve their challenges. The economic situation is different. It is obvious that in Iceland schools are facing more obstacles in funding, renewing equipment and possible development. On the other hand this same economic crisis has perhaps lead to a change in perspective in Iceland that a Norwegian school might benefit from. Using home made techniques, tracing local goods in textiles and handicraft which does not seem to have been brought up in Norway the same way as in Iceland.

This lays ground for possibilities for many fruitful exchanges of ideas.

Ideas of cooperation projects/themes.

So far we have discussed two main fields of cooperation:

1. Student drop-outs: Exchange of good ideas, cooperation to reduce the percentage of drop-outs / early school leavers.
2. Establishment of student exchange programs in vocational studies

We do also see other possibilities, e. g. how do the two schools organize schedules, how

is education for students with special needs organized, cooperation between schools, local county authority and regional/central authority for example when gathering information about students in order to be able to counsel students in danger of dropping out.

1 Student drop outs

Both schools faces severe challenges regarding students not completing their studies. Charlottenlund vgs has the second largest percentage of school drop outs in Sør-Trøndelag county. 69,3% of students at Charlottenlund finished their studies as planned in the school year 2012/13, whereas the county average is 76,3%, identical to the national average in Norway. Verkmenntaskólinn seems to be in the same situation, with potentially an even higher percentage of school drop outs. Here VMA does not have the precise numbers to refer to. Studies of individual students careers in school points to the situation that a group of students really does not have a study program available in VMA that will lead to their graduation from a meaningful study.

The two schools therefore face many of the same challenges, though they seem to try to solve them in rather different ways.

In Norway, all Upper Secondary schools have a system called "Oppfølgingstjenesten" (translated as "follow-up service"). The schools are obliged to follow up students who stop attending, fails in several subjects and/or wants to leave school through this system.

Normally, Oppfølgingstjenesten is carried out by school counselors, who cooperate with local authorities (e.g. "NAV") and others who may help the student if he or she turns out to leave the school temporarily or permanently. Oppfølgingstjenesten plays a central part in the work against school drop outs. Beside this, Charlottenlund has a range of other ways of trying to prevent student drop outs.

This is not the case in VMA. There is no follow up system that ensures that the municipality or any other local authority has comprehensive information about youngsters. If they drop out of school they can be lost to the system. While a student is in VMA the school is developing different possible study programs involving workplaces. One of possible tools is a product of the Leonardo da Vinci Project Workmentor. VMA was the coordinating partner with Skjetlein in Trondheim and five other schools and institutions. The main outcome of this project is a workshop available for people in workplaces taking on the role of mentoring students in the workplace. These are called Workmentors. This could become a key tool in establishing cooperation between school, workplaces and municipalities to work together towards efforts in preventing early school leaving..

To create a project where the schools can interact by exchange experience in preventing student drop outs could potentially be of substantial benefit for both schools. As previously mentioned, the two schools have much in common in regards of organization, size, composition and management systems. Things that have worked in one of the schools are therefore likely to be successful for the other school. Preventing school drop-out is a crucial subject and high on the political agenda in both countries, making this a firm basis for developing a program.

Other schools in other countries may also be linked into this. So far we have mentioned potential collaborators in:

Estonia Finland Germany Denmark (Randers)

2. Student / teacher exchange programs

As the schools have many study programs in common, there are many possible exchange programs that could be of great use for them both. Here are some ideas:

Both Charlottenlund and Verkmenntaskólinn offer technical studies. Whereas Verkmenntaskólinn has a stronghold in a firm connection with local industry (mainly Slippurinn, one of Iceland's biggest shipyards and metal working company) Charlottenlund has a range of modern top-end CNC machinery at the school workshop, and a large department of construction work. Student exchange here is potentially of great benefit for both schools.

Both schools offer programs in art and design. Verkmenntaskólinn specializes amongst other things in a department working with textiles, using looms and local materials and using different techniques to work with fabric and dyes. Charlottenlund students may gain much by visiting this department, whereas Charlottenlund has a very large department of hairdressers and design.

Further action

We suggest that the next steps in our cooperation may consist of:

Study visits for teachers / administrators to both schools.

Writing applications for project funding.

Cooperation independent of funding and relations for example appearing as a team when working with other schools in projects.

Study visits

To get more people to know each other and to get the schools more connected, it will be necessary to organize study visits. We suggest the following:

A delegation from Verkmenntaskólinn visits Charlottenlund vgs in December 2013

A delegation from Charlottenlund vgs visits Verkmenntaskólinn in January 2014

Each visit will take four – five days, two of which will be travel, focusing on making contacts and finding out which connecting points seem to be of the most interest for both schools.

Each delegation may contain heads of departments for technical and art studies and head of counselors and project initiators (4 persons).

Study visits may be financed through funding from county authorities, schools or the NORPLUS programme.

The timing might be difficult because of the need to find funding. However if possible it is very important to meet in December and January to be able to finish any applications to meet deadlines for Leonardo (Erasmus plus) or Nordplus projects in February and March.

Writing applications

So far we see mainly two ways of funding our cooperation:

NORDPLUS Horizontal: This program focuses on developing cooperation improving quality and innovation in education. This program seems to fit well into our thoughts of a cooperation on school drop out thematics.

LEONARDO is an EU program financing projects aiming to improve quality and exchange of ideas in education in vocational studies. Student exchange programs in vocational studies fit well into this program. This program is changing now into Erasmus Plus and needs to be looked into if we want to seek funding there.

Both possible sources of funding may include the need for more partners. If possible it might be beneficial to be able to finish the visits without looking for more partners. It is possible that school administrators find other cooperation opportunities more helpful. Therefore it might be wise to only involve the two schools at the beginning.

Akureyri, 05.10.13

Torkild Svorkmo-Lundberg did the original report from the meeting. See his email from October 5th 2013.

Jóhannes Árnason reviewed and added a few thoughts October 9th 2013.

When sending this report both of us agree that this is a mutual understanding and we truly feel it would be very interesting to explore possibilities of cooperation.